



Commission on Affairs of the Elderly

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Hypothermia Fact Sheet

What is hypothermia?

Hypothermia is a condition where the body gets too cold. A body temperature below 96°F may seem like just a couple of degrees below a normal temperature of 98.6°, but it can be dangerous.

What are the symptoms?

When you think about being cold, you probably think of shivering. That is one thing the body does when it gets cold. It is one way the body warms itself back up again. So how can you tell if someone has hypothermia?

- Watch out for the “umbles”: Stumbles, Mumbles, Fumbles and Grumbles; these show how the cold is affecting a person’s muscles and nerves.
- Other changes you might notice are:
 - Confusion or sleepiness
 - Slowed, slurred speech or shallow breathing
 - Weak pulse or low blood pressure
 - A lot of shivering, or no shivering because of stiffness in the arms and legs
 - Slow reactions because of not being able to control body movements as well as usual

What things put you at risk?

- Water on your skin- you can lose body heat as much as 25 times faster.
Stay Dry = Stay Alive!
- Being in a cold room or outside- your body heat will blow away more quickly
- Clothes- tight clothes may not let your blood flow freely; Several layers of loose clothes will trap warm air between them and help keep you warm
- Low weight- Fat can protect your body by keeping the heat inside. Make sure you are eating enough of the right food to keep you at a healthy weight
- Illnesses- diabetes, hyperthyroidism, and some skin problems. Arthritis, Parkinson’s, memory problems, strokes and paralysis can make it difficult to move around and stay warm
- Medication- for high blood pressure, nervousness, depression or sleeping disorders
- Drinks with alcohol or caffeine can make you lose body heat faster
- Smoking

What to do in case of an emergency?

- Call 911, get medical attention as soon as possible
- Handle the person very gently
- Protect the person from the cold with dry blankets, quilts, towels or extra clothes
- Make sure that you cover the person's head and neck
- If medical care is not available, warm beverages can help increase the body temperature
- Heat packs, hot water bottles, or warm compresses should be applied to the neck, armpits, and groin. A lot of blood pumps through these areas, and the person will warm up faster and safer by warming the blood there
- Do not place the person in a hot shower or bath
- Do not give any alcohol or drugs
- Do not raise the legs or massage the arms or legs